

House Republicans want a rematch.

Democrats were thrilled with President Barack Obama's performance at last week's question-and-answer session with the House GOP, but it's the Republicans — not the White House — who are embracing a call to make question time a regular part of American political life.

"I think it'd be great," said Rep. Paul Ryan (Wis.), the ranking Republican on the Budget Committee, whose exchange with the president over his budget proposal was one of the more substantive parts of Friday's Q&A in Baltimore.

A bipartisan group of activists and journalists — including Mother Jones magazine's David Corn and Americans for Tax Reform's Grover Norquist — are proposing that the president meet regularly with Republicans in televised sessions that would mirror those from the UK House of Commons.

Republican leaders are taking a look at their proposal.

"We had a good discussion with the president in Baltimore about his policies and what we believe are our better solutions," said Michael Steel, a spokesman for Minority Leader John Boehner. "Frankly, the president's acknowledgment that he has read our policy proposals should stop every Democrat — in Congress, at the political committees, and in the White House — from repeating their discredited 'party of no ideas' talking point. So we'll look at this proposal."

Ryan noted that Friday's session was the first time he'd talked to the president about policy. "We didn't get enough of it," he said. "It'd be great if we could get equal time" responding to the president as well as asking questions.

"I would hope that he would repeat such a thing on a periodic basis," added Texas Rep. Jeb

Hensarling, who had a testy exchange with the president about the federal deficit.

Although the media has dubbed Obama the winner of Friday's exchange, Republicans have tried to capitalize on it. Both Hensarling and the National Republican Congressional Committee have used the back and forth in fundraising pitches this week.

As for Obama, he was back in the format Wednesday, meeting with senators from his own party in a somewhat less spirited question-and-answer session.

White House senior adviser David Axelrod told POLITICO earlier this week that Friday's event in Baltimore was so compelling because of the "spontaneity" involved — and he warned that "conventionality will overtake the freshness of that" if the events were to become part of the regular routine.

Deputy press secretary Bill Burton on Wednesday reiterated that view at the White House.

"Now, the president thinks that there is space for more open dialogue, and he's going to look for more opportunities to do things on camera and have open discussions on important issues," Burton said. "But in terms of a regularly scheduled event, I don't have anything for you on that."

As of Wednesday night, the bipartisan group pushing for regular question-and-answer sessions had collected more than 6,000 signatures on an online petition.

Rep. John Campbell (R-Calif.) said he's watched Britain's question time — during which the prime minister takes questions from members of Parliament — and he's thought before that it could be a useful model for the United States to follow.

"I've always thought 'wow this is really a good tradition,'" he said. "[If] our presidents had to do that, that would really be a good thing."

But just because Republicans are supportive doesn't mean they expect the talks to lead to a better working relationship with the other party.

"Words are important, but deeds are more important," said Rep. Mike Pence (R-Ind.), the chairman of the House Republican Conference and the organizer of last Friday's event. "We welcome opportunities to hear from [the president] and the opportunity to be heard by him."

"I have high hopes but low expectations," Hensarling said.

Some Democrats are keen on the idea, too — provided that they get their turns with Obama.

"A lot of us who really worked very, very hard for the president are feeling like he should talk to progressives sometime," said Rep. Keith Ellison of Minnesota.

But won't regular chat sessions inevitably turn into just another venue for politicians to spout talking points and talk past one another?

"Nothing about this is going to turn water into wine," said Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-N.Y.), who said he is thinking about a way to formalize a regular invitation for the president to speak to House members as a part of the House rules.

"[In] most of exchanges we have now in Washington, we are being incentivized by many forces to be as disrespectful as possible," he said. "We see when it comes to the president that the tone is pretty good."

Still, Weiner seemed to admit he wouldn't mind getting some licks in if he were on the other side of the podium: "I can only fantasize what it would have been like if we had ever had one with President Bush or Ronald Reagan."

